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Probiotics show IBS benefits for children: Study

By Stephen Daniells, 20-Aug-2010

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A 'high-potency' lactic acid bacteria supplement may ease the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) in children, says a new study that echoes results from adult studies.

A daily dose of VSL Pharmaceuticals VSL#3 branded probiotic was found to reduce measures of abdominal pain and discomfort and levels of bloating and gassiness, according to findings published in the *Journal of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition*.

"There is evidence that some probiotics [...] have a beneficial role in the dietary management of children and teenagers suffering with IBS," said Stefano Guandalini, MD, lead researcher and professor at the University of Chicago. *"This has the potential to make a real difference for kids who suffer from pain, bloating and discomfort of IBS."*

The precise numbers of IBS sufferers in the US are not known, as many people (adults and children) with mild symptoms do not consult a physician, but it is believed to be between 15 and 30 million.

The long-term condition, from which more women suffer than men, involves abdominal discomfort accompanied by diarrhoea or constipation. Although it is not life threatening and does not lead to other, more serious health conditions, IBS is untreatable. At present, intervention involves management of symptoms.

Furthermore, when it comes to managing IBS in children very little is known about dietary approaches, according to the Chicago-based scientists.

Study details

Prof Guandalini and his co-workers conducted their randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, crossover study with four to 18 year olds. The children and adolescents were randomly assigned to receive placebo or the probiotic supplement (450 billion CFU) for six weeks. At the end of the intervention, the children underwent a two-week washout period and then crossed over for six weeks of the other intervention.

The data showed that, for the 59 children who completed the study, the placebo *"was effective in some of the parameters and in as many as half of the patients"*. However, the probiotic was *"significantly superior to it in the primary endpoint, the subjective assessment of relief of symptoms"*.

In addition, significant reductions were observed in the active supplement group for abdominal pain and discomfort, abdominal bloating and gassiness, and family assessment of life disruption, added the researchers.

On the other hand, no differences between the groups were observed for stool pattern.

Finally, no adverse events were recorded by the researchers, supporting the tolerability of the supplement.

Strain specificity

The benefits of probiotics are specific to the strain of bacteria. Earlier this year, research from Institut Rosell found that *Lactobacillus plantarum* 299v may also reduce the symptoms of IBS like abdominal pain and bloating. The results were presented at Digestive Disease Week in New Orleans in May.

Authors: *Journal of Pediatric Gastroenterology & Nutrition*

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"VSL#3 Improves Symptoms in Children With Irritable Bowel Syndrome: A Multicenter, Randomized, Placebo-Controlled, Double-Blind, Crossover Study"

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